

VZCZCXYZ0000  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #2409/01 3510631  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 160631Z DEC 08  
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2652  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5079  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5186  
RHMFISS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR  
RUACAAA/COMUSKOREA INTEL SEOUL KOR  
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR  
RUEHUL/USDAO SEOUL KOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002409

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/16/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)  
SUBJECT: ROKG TO MAINTAIN FIRM STANCE TOWARDS DPRK

Classified By: Joseph Y. Yun for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. During a December 15 luncheon meeting with the DCM, Dr. Kim Tae-hyo, a principal advisor to ROK President Lee Myung-bak, indicated that President Lee would maintain his firm policy stance toward the DPRK despite internal politics. The DPRK is finding fewer friendly media outlets to influence ROK public opinion in its favor. Kim wanted more U.S. concessions in the U.S.-ROK bilateral relationship. Dr. Chang-hee Nam, who hosted the lunch, invited U.S. and Japanese participation in a ROKG-funded trilateral study. End Summary.

-----  
President Lee to Maintain Firm Stance Toward the DPRK  
-----

¶2. (C) Dr. Kim Tae-hyo, Secretary to the President for National Security Strategy, told the DCM over lunch on December 15 that President Lee Myung-bak (LMB) planned to stay the course in his firm approach toward the DPRK despite criticism. Kim, a principal advisor to President Lee on North Korea, confided that critics within the GNP, as well as the usual opposition critics, would not alter Lee's current policy. Kim said that critics within the GNP were either "liberals" who did not support the President just as there had always been conservatives in the Roh Moo-hyun government, or supporters of LMB's rival and former chair of the GNP, Park Geun-hye, or other younger politicians such as Representative Hong Jung-wook, who did not understand Lee's policies. In response to the last group's concerns, the Blue House was regularly reaching out with information and updates.

¶3. (C) Kim noted that LMB planned to maintain his stance toward the DPRK during the transition to the new U.S. administration. Kim said he thought that the DPRK over the next few months would be cautious about taking any overly provocative or irreversible steps in its nuclear program in order not to alienate the Obama Administration. Kim expected that the DPRK would also return to talks with the ROK in 3-4 months under some face-saving cover when it realized that the ROK would not change its North Korea policy despite a new U.S. administration. In order to make future progress on denuclearization, however, Kim recommended that the new administration should draw up a "comprehensive list of sticks" to use against North Korea since positive inducements would never be enough to change the DPRK's behavior. Kim assessed that the biggest challenge in dealing with the DPRK was China because China would always increase its food, fuel, and monetary support for the DPRK if support from the ROK or the U.S. diminished. Kim said that China prized stability in the DPRK to the point that it was willing to supply whatever was needed to stabilize the North Korean regime.

-----  
DPRK Finds Fewer Friendly Media Outlets  
-----

¶4. (C) When asked whether popular support for LMB's policy toward North Korea was eroding in response to the DPRK's tough rhetoric and actions, Kim said that North Korea depended on its communication channels to the South Korean people in order to win them over but these were gradually being restricted. ROKG support for some was drying up, while other voices in the South sympathetic to the North were being isolated, and still others were being presented with the ROKG's explanations of its policies. As a result, even after ten years of sympathetic reporting about the North, attitudes were changing in the South. While some channels sympathetic to the North like MBC (broadcasting) and Hankyoreh (newspaper) remained, there were only two or three left.

-----  
ROKG Seeks U.S. Concessions  
-----

¶5. (C) Commenting on U.S.-ROK relations, Kim hoped the new U.S. administration would be more responsive to the ROKG's needs. Kim claimed that the U.S. was always pressing the ROKG hard on issues like Afghanistan, burden sharing, base relocation, and Global Hawk; and the ROK tried to be responsive. In contrast, Kim claimed, the USG had not been nearly so forthcoming on FTA ratification, maintaining force levels and capability of USFK, the timing of OPCON transfer, increased intelligence sharing, and the speed with which we relocated our bases. From the ROK perspective, the ROK always seemed to move first. Kim wanted the USG not only to be more willing to proactively make concessions, but also to frankly discuss these issues.

-----  
ROK Professor Proposes Trilateral Study  
-----

¶6. (C) The December 15 lunch which Dr. Kim, the DCM, and the Japanese DCM attended was hosted by Dr. Chang-hee Nam, a professor at Inha University, who has been given an ROKG-subsidized grant to do a research project on how to increase trilateral security cooperation among the ROK, U.S., and Japan. Nam proposed four more meetings with him and his two research assistants, attended by the U.S. and Japanese political-military officers, defense attaches and possibly the DCMs, with the first meeting to be held in March 2009. The resulting report would be an unpublished confidential assessment presented to the ROK's national security advisors. Nam believed that the meetings could foster discussions on a range of issues, including improving interoperability of ballistic missile defense, DPRK contingency planning, and counter-proliferation mechanisms. Both DCMs indicated that the study appeared useful and pledged to consider the proposal further.

¶7. (C) Comment. Kim, who sought to communicate Lee's resolve in maintaining his DPRK policy, appeared to close the door to using various political events as opportunities to refine or modulate his DPRK policy. His request for U.S. concessions as a way to improve the U.S.-ROK bilateral relationship is consistent with similar requests from various ROK officials.  
STEPHENS